

## BOOK REVIEWS

THE BUTTERFLIES OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND, by Jeremy Thomas and Richard Lewington. 1991. Dorling Kindersley, London; published in association with The National Trust. 224 pp., 68 color plates, with distribution maps, life history charts, and halftone figures in the text. Hard cover, 25 × 25 cm, dustjacket, ISBN 0-86318-591-6. £16.99 (about \$27 US).

Of all the world's lepidopteran faunas, those of the British Isles are known with unparalleled completeness, both as an historical and a biological record. For generations, throughout the Victorian era, and for much of the present century, collecting butterflies and moths (and, less commonly, other insect groups) was an accepted and widely encouraged avenue to an appreciation of the natural world. While many left behind their nets and store boxes with their childhood, a general level of interest and awareness often survived, and among those whose life continued into professional entomology, perhaps with staphylinids, pteromalids or mirids, many will admit to a transient phase of butterfly and moth hunting. This phenomenon is not, of course, an exclusively British peculiarity, but only there has an interest in these insects become something of a national institution. One may form the impression that a substantial part of the Anglican clergy, for a century or so, collected Lepidoptera when not engaged in more official pastoral duties, and when this reviewer went to a boarding school in Berkshire, at the age of ten, it seemed entirely natural that each pupil was expected to spend his free time in watching birds, pressing plants, or in the pursuit and rearing of butterflies and moths.

This venerable history of collecting was underpinned by, and reflected in a corresponding wealth of published books and local lists, from the first account to appear in Britain compiled by Thomas Mouffet (1634), which included often recognizable woodcuts of British Lepidoptera and other insects, with a few exotic "rarities." In the sequence that followed are the celebrated eighteenth century works: Benjamin Wilkes' *English Butterflies and Moths* (1749) and *The Aurelian* of Moses Harris (1766) and, in the flowering of Victorian passion for natural history, a spate of popular works, some well known and many now regarded as curiosities of the period. A few outstanding landmarks among more recent works are the finely illustrated eleven volumes of Charles Barrett's *The Lepidoptera of the British Islands* (1893–1907) and Richard South's works on British butterflies and moths, first published in the opening decade of this century, the latter acting as quasi-biblical texts for collectors young and old, for many years. To lepidopterists of this reviewer's generation, the seemingly unsurpassable illustrations of F. W. Frohawk could be admired only by the fortunate few with relatives sufficiently affluent to provide the "Complete Book" (1934), or even his two-volume folio work on the butterflies.

How much simpler and more satisfactory life would have been to a nascent entomologist, in 1945, had the book by Jeremy Thomas and Richard Lewington been available then! As the faunas in the British Isles (and in many parts of Europe) have dwindled in recent decades, the rate of books describing them has accelerated, and the past thirty years has seen over twenty new titles, but in this reviewer's estimation the account by Thomas and Lewington, in quality and balance of text, and artistry of illustration, is the finest account of British and Irish butterflies and their life histories, though appearing at a time when so many species are more likely to be enjoyed vicariously through its pages than seen in the field.

For many years the "British List" of butterflies stood at 68 species, including residents, a few occasional to very rare but well documented migrants, with the long extinct Large Copper (*Lycaena dispar dispar*) and Mazarine Blue (*Cyaniris semiargus*), the Black-veined White (*Aporia crataegi*) which disappeared early this century, and native populations of the Large Blue (*Maculinea arion*), last seen in 1979. Only one has been added in recent times: Berger's Clouded Yellow (*Colias alfacariensis*), distinguished in 1945 from another generally rare visitor, *C. hyale*. Of these, Jeremy Thomas has provided a succinct, lively and informative text, noting the present status of each with clear distribution maps, all too often tracing a species' decline in recent decades and, where possible, including the reasons for the sometimes precipitous range reduction: the Large Tortoiseshell (*Nymphalis polychloros*) now perhaps extinct as a resident, or the Chequered Skipper (*Cartocephalus palaemon*) now restricted to a few western Scottish colonies, and so on.

Any reader who knew the British butterflies in the 1950s and before will have memories of rich localities, of pastures, woods and downland from which once common species have long vanished, even if the land seems superficially to have survived. This book misses no opportunity for optimism, however: a few expanding ranges, of the Essex Skipper (*Thymelicus lineola*), the Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*), and perhaps the White Admiral (*Ladoga camilla*), are recorded, together with current conservation efforts to keep now highly restricted and threatened species on the British List. To read this book in conjunction with South or Frohawk reveals the general and rapid decline of a fauna, for long relatively stable, for which the blame lies almost entirely with habitat change and degradation, in their richly varied aspects.

The illustrations, by Richard Lewington, have never, in my view, been surpassed. Each butterfly is shown by an upperside (of both sexes where appreciably dimorphic) in "set" position, and by an underside in "perching" pose. British lepidopterists have for long paid much attention to aberrations, and many very remarkable examples of these variants are shown. Other figures, illustrating the butterflies at rest or nectaring are particularly striking through Lewington's use of black and white pencil for the plant or other perching site, against which the beauty of the painted butterflies is seen to best advantage. The effect achieved, for example, by a mating pair of Black Hairstreaks (*Strymonidia pruni*) on a penciled blackthorn twig, of a male Purple Hairstreak (*Quercusia quercus*) basking on an oak twig, or the once widespread but now endangered High Brown Fritillary (*Argynnis adippe*) perching on a bramble, selected for the title page, is brilliant. Life history stages are fully and elegantly illustrated, and the life cycle of each, the periods of the year occupied by each stage from egg to adult, is summarized in simple charts, precise to a week or so, attesting to the completeness of our knowledge of the phenology of these butterflies in their British and Irish localities. Where appropriate, the text is embellished with pencil drawings showing aspects of behavior—the courtship sequence of the Wood White (*Leptidea sinapis*), courtship and thermal orientation in the Grayling (*Hipparchia semele*), of ants attending a larva of the Adonis Blue (*Lysandra bellargus*), and others. I have long believed that F. W. Frohawk's illustrations could never be bettered: for seventy years this was true, but in my eye Richard Lewington has achieved this feat.

No apology for use of vernacular names in this book (or indeed in this review) is needed; these came into use with interest in the butterflies, sometimes changing across two centuries and more (without reference to any International Commission) and are an integral part of the history of these faunas, and of the English language. Moreover, the "popular" names have enjoyed a stability not shared by the Linnaean binominals—several long-familiar generic names having changed in recent years. The text is followed by suggestions for further reading, including guides to identification of British and European butterflies, general biology of these insects, and, in recognition of the important contribution made by local natural history societies in Britain, references to selected works on individual counties and other local geographical areas.

The book is published in association with The National Trust; it is well produced and printed, and remarkably inexpensive. It will be admired and enjoyed by all with an interest in butterflies, whether familiar with the faunas covered or not, by those with just a general enthusiasm for natural history and conservation, and by any student of the art of entomological illustration.

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THE LEPIDOPTERA: FORM, FUNCTION AND DIVERSITY, by Malcom J. Scoble. 1992. Natural History Museum Publications. Oxford University Press, 200 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. xi + 404 pp., 321 text figs., 4 color plates. Hard cover, 18 × 25 cm. ISBN 0-19-854031-0. \$78.00.